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ABSTRACT

This study investigates various aspects of the process of transferring to Memphis State University (MSU) as perceived by the transfer student, develops information which could be utilized in evaluating the processes of transfer to MSU, and provides a basis for further study. A random sample of 126 students was selected as subjects for individual interviews. Recommendations suggest: (1) creation of an office which has primary responsibility for working with transfers; (2) Re-title and re-define the Office of High School Relations to include recruitment of transfers; (3) prepare packets of information which can be provided to potential studetns; (4) provide mechanisms for the routine evaluation of transfer credits prior to registration; (5) designate counselors and advisors to work with transfers; (6) review financial aid policies to facilitate aid to transfers; (7) heighten the awareness of needs and contributions of transfer students; (8) an in-house study should be made to determine the man-hours required to evaluate transfer transcripts; and (9) maintain communications with counselors in two-year institutions to develop a better awareness of opportunities for transfer students at MSU. Appendices of related material are included. (MJM)

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REPORT OF

AN INVESTIGATION OF STUDENT'S PERCEPTION OF THE PROCESS OF TRANSFERRING TO MSU

submitted by
Paul K. Preus, Director
Center for the Study of Higher Education

June, 1973

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Paul K. Preus

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INTRODUCTION

The proportion of students entering universities and four-year colleges at the sophomore and junior levels is increasing, while freshman admissions are leveling off. This trend is observable both locally and on a national scale and can be ascribed, in part, to the growth of the two-year junior and community colleges. In Tennessee the community college system is growing and should be feeding increasing numbers of sophomores and juniors into MSU.

Winandy and McGrath reported at the conclusion of their study of admissions policies and practices for transfer students in the State of Illinois:

> The survey shows that little real thought has been given to the transfer student. It would appear that he is too often treated as an educational outcast. This, despite the fact that a movement is afoot throughout the country towards the establishing of interlocking two-year, four-year educational systems.[1]

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[1] Winandy, Donald H. and McGrath, R. A. "Study of Admissions Policies and Practices for Transfer Students in Illinois" College and University, Vol. 45, No. 2, Winter 1970, p. 186.

Gayle C. Wilson, past president of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, emphasizes the need in one declarative sentence: "Change in our admissions policies and procedures for transfer students are inevitable and already overdue."[2]

Studies have been made on a national scale by Knoell and Medsker[3] (1964) focusing upon academic achievements (as indicated by grade-point averages) of transfer students. No study has been made of student perceptions and personal adjustments, occupational-academic advisement, etc. and none is reported in literature.

The collective perceptions of a significant number of transfer students will be useful, both to MSU and to the community colleges, in facilitating the transfer of increasing numbers of students into appropriate university curricula. Evidence should be found regarding the adequacy of pre-transfer planning and counseling as presently practiced by the colleges and the university, as well as information regarding the efficacy of post-transfer services currently available to the students.

PURPOSES OF THE STUDY

The purposes of the study were:

1. To investigate various aspects of the process of transferring to MSU as perceived by the transfer student. Among the aspects studied were:
    a. Pre-transfer communications, information services, initial contact with the University, counseling.

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[2]Wilson, Gayle C. "The Impact of Transfer Admissions in the Next Decade," College and University, Vol. 45, No. 3, Spring 1970, p. 266.

[3]Knoell, Dorothy and Medsker, Leland L. From Junior to Senior College: A National Study of the Transfer Student. Washington: The American Council on Education, 1965.

b. Mechanics of Admissions to MSU, 1. admissions procedures, 2. academic requirements, 3. registration, 4. transfer of credits.

c. Need for and availability of post-transfer services such as orientation, academic advising, career counseling, assistance in obtaining financial aids, employment, and suitable housing.

d. Involvement in and acceptance of, transfer students into social groups and extra curricular activities.

e. How do the transfer students think they are perceived by professors and native students?

f. General suggestions by transfer students for ways to facilitate transfer.

2. To develop basic information which could be utilized in evaluating the processes of transfer to MSU.

3. To provide a basis for further study of transfer students and transfer procedures. It was intended that the preparation and validation of the interview schedule and the investigation outlined in this proposal will serve as a pilot study for a larger study supported by extra-mural funding.

PROCEDURES

With the assistance of the University records office, a list of all (926) students who transferred to MSU in the Fall term, 1972, was prepared. This list identified the entire population of the study. A random sample comprising 126 students, 13.6 per cent of the population, was selected as subjects for individual interview. After an interview schedule had been

prepared, four student interviewers were trained. The interviewers spoke personally with each student in the sample, recording the student's responses to the structured interview questions.

Results have been tabulated, and a preliminary analysis made. At the first stage of analysis, simple frequency counts and general areas of agreement have been identified.

FINDINGS

The first stage of analysis of the data yielded information summarized in the following section.

Demographic data

Sex: Male, 60; Female, 66.

Marital status: Single, 87; Married, 39.

Class: Freshman, 19; Sophomore, 41; Junior, 42; Senior, 20; Other or "Don't know", 4.

Residence status: Tennessee resident, 105; Out of State, 21.

Transferred from: Four-year college, public, 60; Private, 28; Two-year college, public 21; Private, 3; Technical Institute, 5; Foreign students, 5; Other, 4.

Primary reasons given for transfer to MSU: Near home, 46; Financial, 29, Away from home, 7; Boy or girl friend attending, 6; Scholarship, 4.

Second reason: Better department at MSU, 28; Better school, 9; Job in Memphis, 9; Moved here, 7.

Age: 18 years 3

19 21

---

*A copy of the interview schedule is presented in Appendix B.

20	31
21	26
22	8
23	8
24	5
25-29	14
30-35	6
36-40	4
Over 40	2

Mean age = 22.7 years

Median age = 20.4 years

The transfer process

Information derived from the interviews support a number of general statements describing the perceptions of these transfer students regarding certain aspects of the transfer process.

1. The first contact with MSU was initiated by the student (121 cases). In two instances the university initiated communications.
2. Students reported the following time lapse between their submitting applications for admission and notification of acceptance:

Less than one month	24
Less than two months	49
More than two months	53

3. Most students had received some information from MSU prior to registration (94 cases). They (70 of them) thought it was

"adequate." Twenty-eight disagreed.

4. By the time of the interview (March, 1973) most students had been informed of transfer credits accepted (102 cases). Of these, twenty-one knew before they registered, 85 did not. In only six cases would the amount of credit accepted have influenced their decision to enter MSU.
5. Eighty-four students knew which of their credits were applicable to degree requirements.
6. Student opinion of the transfer process at MSU was variable. Judgments ranged thus:

Good	35
Fair	28
Poor	42
Don't know or no opinion	11

7. Suggestions for improvement of the process made most frequently during the interviews indicated that students thought the evaluation of transcripts should be speeded up, that persons making the evaluations should be more knowledgeable, more concerned and more business-like, that more specific criteria should be used and that the students should be kept informed.

Financial assistance and student employment

Most students (112) indicated that they had not applied for financial aid. Of the fourteen who had applied, 7 received some kind of assistance from MSU. However, nearly half the sample (67) said it was necessary for them to work. Incomplete responses provided some indication of the time

these students work:

5 - 20 hours/week	24
21 - 40 hours/week	20
Over 40	1

Fourteen interviewees said MSU had helped them to find employment. The Tennessee Employment Service Office had provided assistance to nine.

Orientation

Less than half the students interviewed (47) had attended an orientation session. Many said they had not known about it and some would not have attended in any case. Of those attending, nine thought the program was helpful. Suggestions in order of frequency were:

1. Provide more information (6)
2. Evaluate transcripts during the orientation (5)
3. Don't have orientation for transfer students (4)

Advising

Nearly all students (115) thought they had been assigned an academic advisor. Most (89) felt their advisor had given them adequate advisement, while 33 indicated the opposite. Nearly half (52) had received advice from someone other than their appointed advisors. Faculty of the student's major department were frequently mentioned as the other source.

Suggestions for improvement were varied, with three recurring.

1. Advisors need to be better informed about requirements and programs.(15)
2. Advisors should be from the student's "area of interest." (12)
3. Students need more time with their advisors. (9)

Registration

Student opinions of the registration process were mixed. Comments ranged from "fantastic" (which was interpreted to mean good) to the unprintable:

Good	25
OK	25
Bad	36
No comment	3

Suggestions frequently made were:

1. Initiate some kind of pre-registration.(28)
2. Register by mail and/or by computer.
3. Do not require transfer students to register with freshmen.

Student life

The great majority (96) of those interviewed were not participating in activities of campus student organizations. Twenty-eight students claimed memberships as follows:

Miscellaneous clubs	13
Sororities	8
Black Student Association	4
Fraternities	3

Half of the students had initiated the contact with the organization in which they were active, while in half the cases, the organization had sought the students' participation.

Planned extracurricular activities attracted most of the students. Although 42 said they attended no MSU sponsored activities, the balance attended and/or participated in:

Athletic contests	52
Concerts	25
Plays	22
Lectures	9
Dances	4
Movies	4
Intramural sports	2
Department activities	1

The respondents generally (71) thought the student services were "adequate." Thirteen disagreed, while 30 expressed no opinion.

Brickbats and bouquets

The interviews ended with a few open-ended questions designed to elicit the perceptions of the students relative to certain aspects of the transfer process and to assess their general feelings about MSU.

Almost unanimously the transfer students interviewed felt that neither their professors nor their fellow students considered them "different" from "native" MSU students. By and large, they thought neither professors nor students knew nor cared that they were newcomers to the campus--an attitude they accepted as proper. The few who said they noted a difference thought that faculty made special efforts to assist them.

When asked to identify the most serious problem they encountered, the respondents identified a wide variety. Most frequently cited were:

1.	Parking	(25)
2.	Transfer procedures	(9)
3.	Personal study habits	(7)

4. Faculty (6)

5. Getting suitable class schedule (5)

6. Personal problems (5)

7. Nobody to talk to (4)

They considered most helpful in transferring to MSU:

1. Friendly people (12)

2. Helpfulness of administration (8)

3. The University College (8)

4. The faculty (7)

5. Their advisors (6)

6. Their department heads (6)

They thought transfer students would be helped most by:

1. Guided tours of the campus and/or better maps and marking of buildings (23)

2. More (early information about MSU (15)

3. Information about courses (7)

4. A calendar of events (7)

Their purposes in attending college were not generally well defined. General purposes identified were:

1. To gain a degree (63)

2. To prepare for a job (26)

3. To please parents (4)

Most of the students liked MSU. Their "general impressions" rated the university:

1. Good (84)

2. OK (23)

3. Poor (16)

Transfers from two-year institutions

Thirty students (23 per cent of the sample) had perviously attended two year schools. Specific institutions in MSU's service area provided the following numbers:

State Technical Institute at Memphis	5
Northwest Mississippi Junior College	4
Jackson State Community College	3
Northeast Mississippi Junior College	2
Freed-Hardeman College	2
Dyersburg State Community College	1
Columbia State Community College	1
Motlow State Community College	1
Itawamba Junior College	1
Martin College	1

Responses of this sub-sample paralleled very closely those of the entire sample. Answers to one question designed specifically for two-year college transfers indicated that five of the thirty had received some assistance from counselors at their previous institutions. Three of the five were from out-of-state colleges.

Limitations of the study

This investigation was designed to gain knowledge about a certain segment of the MSU Student body. No attempt was made to study a sample of "native" students (those who enrolled at MSU as freshmen and have continued their studies here.) Consequently many questions dealing with comparisons of transfer vs. native students cannot be answered.

Summary, conclusions and recommendations

According to the records office, in the Fall,1972,term 926 persons entered MSU as transfers from other post-secondary institutions. In March, 1973, trained interviewers conducted structured interviews with 120 of these transfer students to learn how they viewed their experiences relating to the transfer process and their adjustment to MSU.

The broad picture emerging from these interviews shows the students making the initial contact with the university, finding their way largely unaided through the admission and registration process, learning how their previously earned credits transferred sometime during the winter or spring (if at all), enjoying the same "luck-of-the draw" with their advisors as do all students. About three-fourths thought they received adequate advisement. They enter mostly as sophomores or juniors to prepare for a career or to "get a degree," choosing MSU primarily because it is convenient and inexpensive. (A close connection exists between the two characteristics.) Although nearly half said it was necessary that they hold a job while attending school, only a few sought financial aid or assistance from the university in finding employment. Only about one-fourth of these students had joined campus organizations, but three-fourths attended university sponsored activities--principally athletic events.

Most helpful to them in the process of transferring were concerned people among admissions personnel, university college counselors, faculty and other students. Yet the most common response could be interpreted, "Nobody helped me; I did it all myself." On the other hand, a recurring problem identified could be expressed, "This place is so big and impersonal.

I need someone to talk to, someone (an advisor) who is concerned about me and my problems." Additional problems in communication with respect to credits, courses, degree requirements, their status, registration, were common. The most frequently identified problem was parking.

Conclusions

MSU does not receive a great number of transfer students relative to its total undergraduate enrollment. Nor does it appear to seek them actively, nor to provide services designed to encourage their enrollment. The 926 students identified as transfers represent 5.5 per cent of all undergratuates. Of particular note is the small proportion of students transferring from two-year institutions (23 per cent of the sample) although several community/junior colleges are in the service area. If the sample accurately represents the population, MSU received approximately 225 students from two-year schools, of which 90 came from Tennessee institutions.

A significant number of students interviewed were critical of various aspects of the policies and processes related to transfer and student advisement. Since the study did not investigate the perceptions of native students, it is not known whether transfer students' views differ in any way from those of the "natives."

In the interviews the students discussed two services provided specifically for transfer students: (1) orientation and (2) evaluation of credits. Fewer than half the students attended the orientation, and, again, fewer than half of those attending identified anything "helpful" in the orientation. About an equal number suggested it be discontinued or changed to include evaluation of their credits. The students identified

their orientation needs in very pragmatic terms: finding the buildings and offices, where to park, how to get credits evaluated, how to get an advisor, how to get registered, etc.

Each student had (presumeably) his transfer credits evaluated by the data of the interview, although several still didn't know the outcome of the evaluation. Only one-sixth of the sample said they had received an evaluation prior to registration. A number had not yet been classified by the beginning of the second semester and were, therefore, scheduled for registration with the freshmen. Students repeatedly reported long delays in receiving any word about their credits often saying they had made several trips to the office, and that they had to "keep after them" to get an evaluation. Altogether, student responses gave the impression that the evaluation process was a low-priority activity in the records office, with ill or casually informed personnel making the decisions.

As many of the transfer students see it, if the goals of the university are to develop and test their initiative, persistence and tolerance of uncertainty, the processes of transfer student intake, orientation, advisement, and classification do an outstanding job. If, on the other hand, the university purposes to facilitate their transfer and adjustment to student life at MSU, present practices leave much room for improvement.

Yet, once they have entered and settled down to their study, the transfers find Memphis State a "good school, populated by friendly, helpful people and offering, by and large, a good opportunity for learning." They view many of the difficulties as just necessary results of the "system." While many called for more concern: "I need an advisor

who knows and cares about me," many had found just such people in the admissions office, in their department chairmen, and among the faculty.

Recommendations

Memphis State University should review its basic attitude and body of policies (if any) with regard to transfer students (i.e., "Do we wish to encourage or discourage the enrollment of these students?") If the answer is positive, the recommendations following may be considered:

For immediate action

1. Set up an office or sub-unit which has primary responsibility for working with transfers. This move would say specifically, "We are concerned about you." Among the functions which could be carried out or coordinated by such a unit:
   a. Maintaining communications with other collegiate institutions of the area with regard to academic matters--program, course and credit equivalencies, changes, etc.
   b. Maintaining communications on these matters internally among the appropriate units within the university.
2. Re-title and re-define the Office of High School Relations to broaden the scope of its operation to include recruitment of transfer students.
3. Have admissions office, with the assistance of the appropriate departments and other units, prepare packets of information which can be provided potential students who request information regarding transfer into a specific program or major. This would be better and cheaper than providing a catalog.

4. Provide mechanisms for the routine evaluation of transfer credits prior to the student's first registration--perhaps this could be accomplished in a restructured orientation program.
5. Designate certain counselors and departmental faculty advisors to be specifically prepared and responsible for working with transfer students.
6. Review financial aid policies and practices and revise, if necessary, to facilitate financial assistance to transfer students.
7. Seek to heighten the awareness of needs and potential contributions of transfer students among persons responsible for promoting student activities and organizations, the goal being increased opportunity for participation on the part of these students.
8. An "in-house" study should be made to determine the man-hours required to evaluate the transcripts of the number of transfer students projected to enroll each fall. Then sufficient staff time could be allocated to accomplish this task by an appropriate deadline.
9. An added effort should be made to maintain communication with counselors in two-year institutions and, in cooperation with them, to develop better awareness of opportunities for transfer students at MSU.

Action for the longer term

Initiate a study of alternative systems used in other institutions

for facilitating the transfer process. A number of leading American universities have established offices of Collegiate Affairs or of College Relations for the purpose of providing liaison services to institutions of higher education in their service area. Insights could be gained which would assist MSU in providing more effective services to transfer students.

Questions still unanswered

As with most research, this study raises more questions than it answers. Therefore, further investigation would be valuable in determining:

1. How do native students view these same universal functions?
2. What proportion of transfer students persist in attendance and achieve a degree?
3. What trends can be determined in the numbers, levels, declared major interests, etc. of transfer students?
4. When do transfer students make their decisions to attend MSU? (Perhaps some problems are caused by late applications.)
5. Are transfer students different from native students in their experiences and perceptions of the MSU policies and procedures under investigation in this study?

STUDENT COMMENTS

Selected student comments are included in Appendix A under headings related to functions studied. The author has tried to include a range of comments, both positive and negative, in about the same frequency as they were offered throughout the interviews. The purpose is to give the reader the "flavor" of the students' reactions, not to provoke rebuttals.

APPENDIX A

SELECTED STUDENT COMMENTS

Orientation

Helpful activities:

"None."

"Getting advisor."

"The whole meeting."

"Nothing."

Comments:

"Most beneficial! It answered a lot of questions for me."

"Didn't know about it." (repeated many times.)

"Wish I had received an invitation."

"The whole thing was helpful."

Suggestions:

"Cut it out and just assign advisors."

"Have it earlier so that if you need to get something done, you will have time."

"Orientation wasn't helpful, but if they would give us a list of specific items that should be done and where to go for them, it would help."

"More information about how to complete resigration."

Registration

* "Transfer students should not have to register last."
* "Smooth--just smooth."
* "It's a hassle."
* "I don't think it's fair that kids get upper-class students to pull their cards."

* "Antiquated--should have pre-registration and computerized registration process."

* "Not bad. I like it better than computer process--at least you can shuffle it while you're making out schedule."

* "Good as any other school."

* "Tedious. People (teachers) that gave cards were helpful."

* "One hellafied, confusing, situation!"

* "The first time I went through with the freshmen, it was a bummer, but last semester it was pretty good--no trouble at all."

* "Jungle, but that is about all you can do with this large of a student body."

* "It's not too bad. It went pretty fast for me. I heard it was really awful, but so far it's gone real good."

Advisement and Advisor

* "I found an advisor myself after coming to MSU."

* "I'm sort of 'skating through.' Advisors only mess you up. I can get a signature any time."

* "One professor signed another's name on my slip. I haven't ever seen my advisor."

* "I think he advises me because he has to, not because he believes in it."

* "I wish she had more time for me. I need to talk to someone who knows and cares."

* "Is it really necessary for an advisor to sign my slip? I'm old enough (26) to know what I want."

* "I went and found one myself."

* "I've never met him."

* "I received the best help from the college I attended before. They have written and suggested type of course I should take here."

* "She has tried to be helpful, but she doesn't know too much."

* "He's so nice and helps so much. I couldn't get along without him."

* "Suits me fine. He doesn't mother me--only tells me the possibilities."

Transfer process

* "I dropped out without withdrawing twelve years ago. Now I can't escape my bad academic record, but I've changed."

* "Evaluation took too long. I didn't get it until the second semester."

* "When a student transfers with over, say, 65 hours, possibly some freshman requirements could be altered."

* "I had no trouble and thought the system was very good."

* "Horrible! They should be willing to accept some hours without the course being exactly the same. Each school has different requirements, but they should be willing to compromise."

* "This is where I'm confused."

* "I haven't been told yet, but I think all my credits will be accepted."

* "They should enlarge the staff to provide more prompt evaluation."

* "It's too slow and not at all fair."

* "Don't be so rigid. One course should equal another without all the little details applied."

* "I think it's real good, because they accepted all my credits."

* "Very poor. They had my transcript a long time before school started, but did not complete evaluation until November."

* "No problems, so no gripes."

* "Yes, finally (notification of credit evaluation). It took a long time."

* "Go to quarters. Get together with the state system."

* "I'm still confused about it."

* "A lot of inexperienced people do the work, and some aren't careful."

* "O.K. I don't know anything wrong with it."

* "When they evaluate your transcript, the student should be there, because the evaluators can't tell from the description of courses in the catalog.

* "Memphis State didn't spend that much time in acceptance of my courses. The people weren't really concerned with me as a potential student. You would think they would be a lot more friendly to attract students to come here."

Number

Hometown & State _____ _____

Sex _____ Race _____ Age _____

Marital Status _____ Military Service _____

Total Semester Hours Earned _____ At MSU _____

Overall G.P.A. _____ Major _____

Classification _____

Tennessee Resident or Non-resident _____

Post-secondary institutions attended:

	Name	Type	Size	Dates	Degree
1.					
2.					
3.					

1. Date of first enrollment at MSU.

2. How many hours are you presently taking?

3.a Primary reason for transfer to MSU.

1. Finance

2. Near home

3. Scholarship

4.

b Any other reasons for choosing MSU?

4.a What was your first contact with MSU regarding transfer?

b Was this first contact initiated by you or MSU? If MSU, who or what MSU office.

5.a Did you receive information from MSU before a registration for classes?

b If Yes, what type information?

c Was this information adequate? If no, why?

6.a Did you receive any information about MSU from community-junior college counselor? If yes, what?

b Was it accurate? Useful?

7.a When did you apply for admission to MSU?

Month _____ Year _____

b When did you receive notice of acceptance to MSU?

Month _____ Year _____

8. What information were you required to provide MSU?

1. Test scores

2. High school transcript

3.

9.a Have you been informed of transfer credit hours accepted by MSU?

b If yes, prior to, or after, acceptance for admission?

c Did this influence your decision to transfer to MSU?

10.a How many credit hours were acquired before coming to MSU?

b How many credit hours were accepted by MSU?

c Have you been informed if these transfer credit hours accepted are applicable to degree requirements excluding electives?

11.a What are your opinions of the transfer of credit process at MSU?

b Do you have any suggestions for improvement?

12.a Did you apply to MSU for financial assistance?

b If yes, was it approved and what type? Was it adequate?

c If application was denied, do you know why?

13.a Is it necessary for you to work while attending MSU?

b If yes, did you find employment? On or off campus?

14.a Did MSU assist you in securing employment?

b If yes, what office assisted you?

15. How often do you work and what is your work schedule?

16.a Did you participate in MSU orientation activities for new students? If yes, what?

b Which activities were most helpful?

c Do you have any suggestions for the orientation process?

17.a Have you been assigned an academic advisor?

b When was this advisor assigned?

c Has your advisor given you adequate academic advisement?

d Have you received academic advisement from anyone other than your advisor? If so, from whom?

e Do you have any suggestions for improvement?

18.a What is your opinion of the MSU registration process?

b Do you have any suggestions for improvement?

19.a What was most helpful to you in the process of transferring to MSU? Please be specific and list items according to priorities.

20. What has been the greatest problem you have been faced with since arriving at MSU?

21.a What campus student organizations are you participating in?

b Was this participation initiated by you or the organization?

22. What MSU planned extracurricular activities do you participate in?

23. As a transfer student, how do you think MSU faculty, students, and administrators perceive you as compared to non-transfer students?

24. Are student "services" adequate? If not, what would you add or do?

25. What "aids"do you think would help transfer students? Either before or after arrival on campus.

26. What "type" of student are you? Give personal characteristics and try to be truthful!

27. What is your "general"impression of MSU?

28. For what purpose are you attending college?